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ABSTRACT

This document reports results of a spring 1973 survey of library use by students at two of the four regional centers at Empire State College (ESC), the new, nontraditional college without a campus of the State University of New York. Because ESC is mandated not to duplicate the resources of the State, students must use existing public and academic libraries. To date, they have had both successes and problems. Overall, the survey showed the need for the College to look into maintaining small core libraries as well as formal liaison with public library officials, and take steps to increase the library sophistication of students. (Author)

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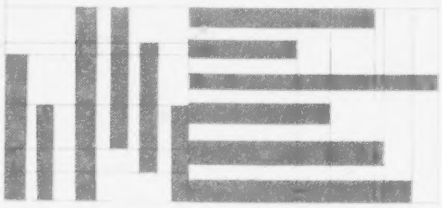

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EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE
SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. 12866

EDITOR'S NOTE: This report was prepared by A. Paul Bradley, Jr. and Ernest G. Palola with the assistance of Judith Adamson, Office of Research and Evaluation.

ESC STUDENT LIBRARY USE

Introduction

The campus of Empire State College is the State of New York and its vast resources. The College will not duplicate these resources. Such statements make persuasive rhetoric and fuel the public imagination about the College. However, rhetoric does not always square with reality. A key resource that Empire State should not duplicate is libraries, for ESC is charged with finding ways to utilize the many academic and public libraries already established. To see how well the students of the College are accomplishing this, the Office of Research and Evaluation conducted surveys of the students enrolled at the Genesee Valley Regional Center in Rochester and Long Island Regional Center in Old Westbury in spring, 1973. This issue of Research and Review reports results of these surveys.

The Surveys

The Genesee Valley Regional Center is in Rochester, a city with a well-established public library system and no large State University units. The Center's region currently stretches to Buffalo, the southern tier, Utica, and Watertown but most students are from areas close to Rochester.

In March, 1973, the Office of Research and Evaluation sent a library survey questionnaire to the 392 active GVRC students. 137 questionnaires were returned. Of the respondents who have been at ESC between one and six months, 60 are full-time students and 28 part time. Of those who have been at ESC from six to twelve months, 26 are full time and 11 part time. Ten full-time and two part-time students have been at the College over twelve months.

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The Long Island Center at Old Westbury is in a different type of region from the Genesee Valley. Long Island is automobile-dominated, spread-out, and has many municipalities. The public library resources available are thus less centralized. This effects the library usage patterns.

In January a library survey questionnaire was sent to the 294 active Long Island students. 149 questionnaires were returned. Of the students who had been at ESC between one and six months, 75 were enrolled full time and 35 part time. Of the students who have been at ESC from six to twelve months, 18 were full time and 12 part time. No students from Long Island who returned the

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TABLE 1

Primary Libraries Used By
Genesee Valley Center Students

# of Students	Library
56	Rochester Public
6	University of Rochester, SUNY-Geneseo
4	SUNY-Buffalo, Cornell University, Buffalo & Erie Public
3	Syracuse Public, Monroe Community College
2	J. Prindergast Public, SUNY-Brockport, SUNY-Cortland, Syracuse University Library, Buffalo Public, Genesee Community College, SUNY College-Buffalo, Elmira College
1	Amherst Public, Auburn Seymour Public, Bell Laboratories, Boston University, Buffalo State College, Cortland Free Library, Dansville Public, Elmira College (Steel), Genesee Valley Regional Center, Greece Public, Harnell Public, Henrietta Public, Jefferson County Community College, Keuka College, Library of Educational Opportunity Center, Lockport Public, Lyons Public, Memorial Art Gallery, Ohio State University, Ontario Institute State Education, Reynolds-Rochester Public, Rochester Institute of Technology, Sodus Free Library, St. Bonaventure University, Seymour Public, Spencerport Public, Strong Memorial Hospital, SUNY College-Fredonia, SUNY-Albany, SUNY-Alfred Tech, SUNY Binghamton, Tompkins County Public, Utica College, Wolcott Public, Xerox Library Service

TABLE 2

Primary Libraries Used By
Long Island Students

# of Students	Library
15	SUNY - Stony Brook
8	Nassau Community College
7	South Huntington Public
5	East Meadow Public, Huntington Public, Plainview Public, Port Washington Public, North Babylon Public
4	Hofstra University, Great Neck Public, Hempstead Public
3	Northport Public, Smithtown Public, Long Beach Public, Wantagh Public, Queens Public, SUNY - Farmingdale
2	C. W. Post College, Farmingdale Public, Sayville Public, Westbury Public, Hicksville Public, Levittown Public, Roslyn Public, Suffolk Community College, Scarsdale Public, Merrick Public, Babylon Village Public, Valley Stream Public, Oyster Bay Public, Hewlett Public, Bryant Public, Garden City Public
1	Columbia University, East Islip Public, Freeport Memorial, Franklin Square Public, Harbor Fields Public, Islip Public, Island Park Public, Jericho Public, Lindenhurst Public, Lynnbrook Public, Library of Congress, Middle County Public, Medical Library at Sagamore, Nassau County Medical, New York Public, North Bellmore Public, Patchogue Public, Plainedge Public, RCA Institute Library, Russell Public, Riverhead Free, Sachem Public, Seaford Public

questionnaire had been studying with ESC over twelve months, in large part, because the Center itself is only ten months old. Nine students have been both a full- and a part-time student at some point.

The first question asked which library the student uses most often in connection with studies at ESC. For the GVRC, Rochester Public Library leads the list by a great length, 56 students using it (Table 1). The University of Rochester and the State University of New York at Geneseo were used by only six students each. For Long Island, the State University at Stony Brook comes out on top but thirteen of the next sixteen are public libraries (Table 2). The tables show that students of the two Centers are indeed using a large number and variety of libraries.

The second question asked the student for an estimate of how many times he or she might use the library in a normal week. Table 2 shows that most respondents use the library an average of only once a week though there is a substantial number who use it more often.

TABLE 3

Frequency of Library Use

Uses per Week	Number of Students At: Genesee Valley	Long Island
0	5	3
1	67	64
2	32	48
3	20	24
4	6	4
5	3	5
6+	4	1
N =	137	149

The third question asked about student borrowing privileges. 125 at the GVRC answered that they had such privileges and 12 said they did not while at Long Island, 139 said "yes" and 10 "no." Those who responded "no" often cited the slowness of ESC ID card distribution as the major factor. One student noted in this regard: "ESC never got around to issuing a greatly needed ID card and therefore use of SUNY facilities has been impossible." In other cases, borrowing privileges were not obtainable because the library was at an independent college or university that did not recognize ESC student needs as legitimate. Genesee Valley students brought up this problem most regularly in connection with the excellent facilities at the University of Rochester.

There is a fair amount of confusion about borrowing from State University libraries. While all ESC students should by SUNY policy have the right to check out books, use reading rooms, and borrow other materials, some students at both Centers suggested that the College obtain such rights. This confusion probably reflects the lack of sophistication of some arriving ESC students as much as a slip-up in their orientation workshops. The problem can perhaps be eliminated by following one student's suggestion: "...the College should make available a list of all libraries in the area and indicate their relative receptiveness."

Question 4 asked how many items (i.e. books and other materials) the student had checked out of the library since September 1. Table 4 shows the results and indicates that students at both Centers are having a noticeable impact on library materials.

TABLE 4

Library Items Borrowed

# of Items	Number of Students At: Genesee Valley	Long Island
0	9	10
1-5	16	18
6-10	22	25
11-25	42	45
26+	48	51
N =	137	149

Although it appears that many students are obtaining materials through libraries, some respondents stated that they are buying their books instead. The main reason given is the desire to develop a personal library. Other students find it difficult to get the right book out of the library at the right time and thus "...it is easier just to buy them." Another important reason is that the borrowing time for a library book is often too restrictive. One person stated: "The only trouble I really dislike was not being able to keep a book the length of a contract." Still another way to avoid the library is to borrow from other students. One GVRC student suggested an "inter-student material exchange program" and even offered to set up and run it. One Long Island student suggested that mentors ought to lend their personal books (a traditionally expensive pastime).

Apparently the Long Island and GVRC students are not using the inter-library loan program of the New York State Library to a great extent though many students have tried it (Table 5). This may reflect the high quality of available libraries, lack of persistence on the part of ESC students, bad experiences in the past, or lack of practice with or even knowledge of the system.

TABLE 5

Use of Interlibrary Loan

# of Uses	Number of Students At: Genesee Valley	Long Island
0	51	55
1-5	53	56
6-10	19	23
11-25	11	10
26+	3	5
N =	137	149

In question 6, we tried to determine the number of times students have requested reference assistance at the library used most often. Table 6 indicates that ESC students are not monopolizing librarians' time, but their presence is felt.

TABLE 6

Requests for Reference Assistance

# of Requests	Number of Students At: Genesee Valley	Long Island
0	38	29
1-5	79	84
6-10	13	18
11-25	4	17
26+	3	1
N =	137	149

One goal of the survey was to find out specifically the areas in which students are having problems with libraries. Table 7 shows results in four categories: SUNY 4-year and university level institutions, SUNY 2-year institutions, private and independent academic institutions, and public libraries.

TABLE 7

Types of Library Problems:
Genesee Valley and Long Island Regional Center Students

Problem Type	SUNY 4-Yr.		SUNY 2-Yr.		Private Libraries		Public Libraries	
	GVRC	*LIRC*	GVRC	*LIRC*	GVRC	*LIRC*	GVRC	*LIRC*
None	34	*29*	44	*79*	56	*76*	57	*85*
Locating Materials	10	*13*	7	*4*	7	*8*	30	*40*
Borrowing	10	*11*	5	*6*	35	*22*	5	*11*
Interlibrary Loan	2	*2*	3	*3*	8	*5*	7	*17*
Reference Assistance	1	*5*	3	*3*	3	*3*	6	*4*
Students having a problem	23(40%)	*29(48%)*	18(29%)	*16(17%)*	53(49%)	*76(67%)*	48(46%)	*81(54%)*
Students having no problems	34(60%)	*31(52%)*	44(71%)	*79(33%)*	56(51%)	*38(33%)*	57(54%)	*68(46%)*

The most often cited problem is in locating materials in public libraries. This probably reflects the differing library resource interests of Empire State students from those of the general public: serious academic versus leisure time reading. (Note: all Long Island Center students responded to this question indicating that every one has used or tried to use a public library.) The next most prominent problem is borrowing from libraries at private and independent colleges and universities. One LIRC student highlighted his response noting that at these facilities ESC people are "...often not even allowed in-library reading privileges." Continued diplomacy by ESC administrators apparently is needed in order to make these libraries more available to the students.

The last question on the survey asked for general comments dealing with ESC and library use. In response, several students suggested: "The establishment of a library at ESC would be a tremendous asset." Eight people mentioned that they would like library facilities right at the Long Island Center and six at the Genesee Valley Center did the same. One even went further: "ESC should have its own library for students and also a bookstore." Apparently one of the basic

Empire State College principles - The College will not duplicate the rich and varied public and private collections which are available to the citizens of the State - is not clear to all students.

Surveys tend to uncover negative feelings. Asking for general comments leaves the field wide open for criticism and complaints. However, in the Long Island Center survey, here are three comments praising certain libraries and library systems: "Stony Brook has been very helpful," "Full cooperation from the Nassau Library System," "I have received remarkable assistance at the excellent Riverhead Library."

Overall, most students at these two Centers seem to be finding library resources and ways to use them. As Empire State College matures, it will be interesting to see if library use increases and becomes easier for the students.

Some Final Observations

There is notable similarity in the responses of the students at the Genesee Valley and Long Island Centers. The only major variation is in the large number of different public libraries used by the Long Island students. The Genesee Valley students are able to use the large and well-established Rochester Public Library. At both Centers, students have tapped a great number of library collections, have acquired borrowing privileges, have utilized the interlibrary loan program, and have asked for and received reference assistance. The number of books borrowed by the students at the two Centers indicates that the College's presence is felt at circulation desks. As enrollments rise and as the two most prominent problems are solved by ESC officials - slow distribution of student ID's and resistance at some private and independent institution libraries to the legitimacy of ESC use - the already noticeable overall impact of Empire State College on the library resources of New York State will increase.

The two surveys also raise some important questions. First, is it naive to assume that the many libraries of New York State can effectively handle Empire State College student needs? As students of the great universities long ago discovered, collections in the millions are little solace when there are only a few copies of a book that fifty people need. If certain books are good enough for ESC mentors to assign, chances are professors at traditional institutions assign them too. This ties up the academic library resources while public libraries with their diverse, leisure-oriented clientele, may not even purchase these books in the first place. The problem has already arisen leading to suggestions that ESC start a library, mentors allow more substitutions in bibliographies, mentors loan their personal books, and that ESC administrators try to persuade various academic libraries to limit the time allowable for book circulation.

A second question which relates to the first is whether ESC administrators should find ways to let public libraries know what books may be requested by

the students. While the mechanics of this possibility are most complicated, some formal interfacing may be essential if the public library sector is ever to fulfill its potential as a resource for this College.

The third question raised by the surveys: What is the responsibility of ESC for increasing student sophistication with libraries? A number of confused responses regarding such services as interlibrary loan raises this question. Also raising it are responses suggesting such things as an ESC bookstore and that all books on reading lists be maintained at the Centers. The College may have to consider some accommodations for its non-traditional student body.

Future research efforts may again examine library use by students, particularly as it relates to cost/effectiveness. Effective library use is a critical factor in Empire State College's attempt at meeting its ambitious goals.

July 1973